

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 THE HAGUE 002052

SIPDIS

STATE FOR G, INL, INL/T, EUR/UBI
ONDCP FOR AGRESTI
DEA FOR OFE/MORALES, COLEY
DOJ FOR OIA/FRIEDMAN
BRUSSELS FOR USEU, LEGATT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: CORRUPTION AND DRUG TRAFFICKING AT SCHIPHOL AIRPORT

REF: (A) THE HAGUE 293; (B) THE HAGUE 1784 (C) 2003 THE
HAGUE 3199 (D) PARAMARIBO 546

Summary

1. The Schiphol 100% control measure, designed by Justice Minister Donner to stop drug trafficking into the Netherlands from the Netherlands Antilles, Aruba, Suriname, and later Venezuela, is now in its ninth month. Donner touts the measure as a success, citing declining cocaine seizures at Schiphol as an indicator. The measure deters drug trafficking. Based on this assessment, the Minister plans to continue the policy indefinitely. Widely publicized attempts by drug traffickers to circumvent the 100% controls, however, have raised questions about their efficacy. Recent investigations at Schiphol, for example, led to the arrests of fourteen baggage handlers and four shop assistants accused of smuggling drugs through uncontrolled airport channels. In addition, Dutch local law enforcement and press claim the Schiphol controls have led to large-scale diversion of drug trafficking to other regions. Donner disagrees and has stated law enforcement is on alert for possible diversion. Post is contacting law enforcement elsewhere to make an assessment.

2. Summary Con't: U.S. continues to express concern about the "catch and release" of low-level couriers component of the Schiphol control policy. Dutch law enforcement officials do not interrogate couriers prior to release. Nor do they share basic identifying information with the U.S., inhibiting international investigations and discovery of underlying criminal networks. Embassy (including DEA) officers are pushing for access to data on drug couriers arrested or detained at Schiphol. End Summary

Corruption

3. The arrest in Suriname on July 26 of a Dutch national ended an investigation into a drug trafficking organization engaged in the import of cocaine through the secured baggage handling area at Schiphol. The suspect was recently deported to the Netherlands. In April 2003, Schiphol Customs officers discovered two baggage containers containing 40 kilos of cocaine. An investigation by the CargoHarc team, comprised of Kmar military police, fiscal investigation/control service (FIOD-ECD) and Customs and led by the Haarlem public prosecutor, showed criminals in various South American countries, including Curacao and Brazil, had been hiding shipments of cocaine in suitcases and baggage containers. Upon unloading at Schiphol, the drugs were removed and taken outside to avoid screening. Since August 2003, 19 Dutch suspects have been arrested, including 14 baggage handlers. In addition to seizures of more than 60 kilos of cocaine, the police have seized firearms, 750,000 euros in cash, jewelry, cars and a boat. In December 2003, the Schiphol court convicted and sentenced the first six suspects to seven years imprisonment. The case against the other 13 is scheduled for Fall 2004.

4. On July 14, 2004, the Kmar military police reported a Kmar/Customs investigation had proven personnel of tax-free shops at the airport had played an important role in cocaine trafficking. Four shop assistants and five drug couriers have been arrested so far. According to Kmar, they had been working in the "See Buy Fly" shops where security passes are required. Baggage of shop assistants is searched on entry, but only randomly upon departure. The case confirms the image of the airport as a prominent transit point for cocaine.

5. The issue of drug corruption at Schiphol has also earned parliamentary attention. In April 2004, Justice Minister Donner said in reply to Lower House (Second Chamber) questions that investigations had shown organized crime was trying to press and bribe employees and law enforcement personnel into criminal drug activities. Donner said, over the past three years, 18 employees of private organizations working at Schiphol had been prosecuted, in addition to the

14 KLM baggage handlers arrested in February. Donner could not state how many public sector employees had been arrested and prosecuted because the information is not public.

Prevention and Investigation of Corruption

16. According to Donner, the "Schiphol Integrity Platform," a public-private partnership at Schiphol meant to reduce crime at the airport, encourages companies established at the airport to adopt National Crime Squad recommendations about general crime prevention measures. The chief prosecutor of the Haarlem court district chairs the Integrity Platform. Participants are airlines, Schiphol airport, retailers, freight companies, the local government of Haarlemmermeer, Customs, the Kmar military police, the prosecutor's office, and the Amsterdam Chamber of Commerce. Participation is voluntary. According to Donner, the companies themselves are responsible for implementing the recommendations about prevention.

17. In Parliament, Donner said the Kmar, Customs and National Crime Squad were charged with controls and investigations at the airport. The special Unit Randstad Noord (URN), which is part of the National Crime Squad, has been actively operating at Schiphol since 1999. The URN, a 70-member joint team of Kmar, police, and FIOD-ECD, is responsible for Schiphol's overall law enforcement. According to Donner, the team, now located a half-hour drive from Schiphol in Heemskerk, will be physically housed at the airport in August 2004. The Schiphol team task force, set-up in 1993 to fight drug trafficking, is also active at the airport. The team, made up of Customs and Kmar, is responsible for incoming and outgoing passenger controls. DEA agents from The Hague Country Office who have visited the Schiphol team site report the operation is efficient, the detectives are professional, and all pertinent services - including evidence processing, detention facilities, two court rooms and a prosecutor's office - are available on-site.

18. Earlier this year, two URN leaders reported it would be impossible to make Schiphol drug-free. Schiphol handles some 41 million passengers and 1.2 million tons of freight per year, or 120,000 suitcases per day. The URN leaders estimated some 40,000 kilos of cocaine were annually smuggled via Schiphol, of which only 5,000 were for domestic use. The URN has set up the High Tech Crime Initiative Schiphol (HTCIS) project to address the vulnerability of the digital infrastructure at Schiphol. According to project leader Eikelenboom, criminals obtain and manipulate business information through IT to facilitate drug smuggling. Outgoing URN chief Van Dorp pleaded for closer cooperation by government organizations and between government and companies at the airport. He noted the fight against criminals would be served by allowing prior consultation of passenger lists by his team. Since its establishment in 1999, the URN has arrested 25 criminals, who together have been sentenced to more than 170 years in prison.

19. Below are Justice Ministry statistics about cocaine seizures by Schiphol Customs in airfreight (including mail and courier shipments):

2000: 1,692 kilos (274 findings)
2001: 734 kilos (382 findings)
2002: 858 kilos (456 findings)
2003: 2,211 kilos (612 findings)

According to the Justice Ministry, by far the most drug freight comes from the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname.

Drug Trafficking: 100% Controls

10. On June 3, the Telegraaf newspaper reported, according to an internal Justice Ministry document, drug runners would not be deterred by the 100% controls. The Ministry published a clarification stating the document had been based on a discussion about possible preventative effects of media campaigns. The conclusion was the few drug runners still daring to come through the Netherlands would not be deterred by media campaigns as they had already made a conscious choice to smuggle drugs. The Ministry praised the positive effects of the 100% controls, including "the sharp decrease in the number of bolita swallows, and the near elimination of cocaine on airlines."

11. Reports from Embassy Paramaribo support skepticism that the Schiphol policy deters drug trafficking from countries of origin. Recent cable traffic indicates the number of narco-traffickers caught leaving Suriname for the Netherlands dropped only slightly following the institution of the 100% controls (ref: D). DEA agents at Post are also skeptical of the policy's deterrence value.

¶12. In his reply to parliamentary questions relating to negative reports about his Schiphol interdiction policy, Donner said the 100% controls had had a noticeable and positive effect. He noted criminal organizations were obviously hindered by the controls. According to Donner, the Schiphol team was watching possible diversions in smuggling routes. He said more than 1,200 kilos of cocaine have been seized so far this year by the Schiphol team. The monthly cocaine seizures are dropping rapidly, from more than 500 kilos in January to 80 kilos in May. According to Donner, the number of drug mules has dropped, but more "bolita swallows" are being found. Donner noted, however, they could only swallow a limited quantity of drugs. Overall, Donner considers the Schiphol policy a success. He will continue it for now, including the "temporary" measure of turning back "bolita swallows" carrying less than three kilos ("catch and release").

¶13. Donner said, up to mid-June, some 2,875 persons had been arrested at Schiphol on suspicion of cocaine smuggling. Of this group, 1,108 (38.5%) were sent away without a subpoena. Donner concluded "the consequent use of the 100% controls on risk flights has clearly led to a drop in the number of couriers and cocaine seizures." According to Donner, the measure may well be a useful and desirable instrument to fight Schiphol drug trafficking on the longer term.

¶14. Donner also provided an overview of the number of drug cases under Art. 2 of the Dutch Opium Act handled by the court in Haarlem (Schiphol):

2002: 2,312
2003: 2,630
June 2004: 1,632
2004 Est.: 3,917

Number of Subpoenas Issued under Art. 2 of Opium Act
(since December 2003, drug couriers with less than 3 kilos are not issued a subpoena):

Dec. 2003 : 125
Jan. 2004 : 99
Feb. : 123
March : 125
April : 128
May : 134
June thru 6/11: 106

Diversion

¶15. Despite Donner's assurance to the contrary, chief public prosecutor Swagerman of the Roermond region (near the German and Belgian borders) reported in July the 100% controls were so predictable drug criminals were massively diverting to other locations and smuggling methods. He now observed many Antillean drug gangs operating in his region. He warned the 100% controls, which take up a lot of police and customs capacity, had created opportunities for traffickers to use other, less controlled routes.

¶16. Various drug addiction experts believe the successful approach of stopping "bolita swallows" at Schiphol doesn't mean less cocaine is entering the country. They think insufficient attention is being paid to imports through other channels, such as the Rotterdam port. The Volkskrant daily quoted Jellinek clinic drug expert Roel Kersemakers: "The market price of cocaine has not gone up; drug smuggling via Schiphol is too insignificant to be able to achieve a price drop." Rotterdam criminologist Damian Zaitch estimated last year drug smuggling via Schiphol was not even 10% of total drug imports. He suggested a majority of drugs entered the country via Rotterdam and Amsterdam ports and through airfreight. In reaction to these criticisms, an MoJ spokesman denied port controls were being neglected and said this remained a MOJ priority.

¶17. A day after the Ministry's denial (June 28), the Volkskrant paper reported despite increasingly sharper controls and security measures, drug smugglers were again choosing large seaports to import/transit drugs. After years of steadily dropping drug seizures, ports such as Rotterdam and Antwerp have shown increases over the past six months. Dutch Seaport Police Commissioner In 't Veld, noted a "considerable rise" in Rotterdam drug transits. Only six months previously, he had pressed success stories in the fight against drug smuggling on the media. For instance, cocaine seizures in 2003 in Rotterdam dropped significantly to less than 1,000 kilos, whereas in previous years, much more was seized in a single month. At the time, he attributed the drop to better controls and investigation techniques. In 't Veld had no explanation for the rising seizures.

The Stopover Problem

¶18. On June 10, the Telegraaf pointed out a way around the Schiphol controls by using Schiphol as a stopover to another Schengen country. A European baggage rule bans controls of baggage on stopovers, allowing controls only at the final destination. In addition, if Schiphol is the final destination, baggage on these Schengen flights is hardly checked because Customs and Kmar personnel are too busy checking the direct flights from Suriname, Aruba and the Antilles. The paper also noted, with the recent Air France takeover of KLM, there were no longer direct flights between Venezuela and Schiphol - they now go to Paris. This means controls on Venezuelan flights, which Donner instituted in April (reftel B), are not taking place.

Missed Opportunities

¶19. DEA liaisons in The Hague cite additional problems with the Schiphol policy involving lost opportunities to gain intelligence on drug runners and the organizations for which they work. First, the names of detained couriers are only shared with certain airlines and selected countries, (the Dutch exchange passenger data with Belgium, Germany, France and the U.K.), but not with the U.S. Because there is no central database flagging those caught and turned back under the Schiphol policy, a repeat offender will only be caught if they travel again on one of the select airlines using the same name. Embassy and DEA are currently engaged in negotiations to obtain weekly summaries of couriers detained and/or arrested at Schiphol for inclusion in DEA and other US databases. We have argued that sharing this information enhances international investigations and leads to the disruption and dismantling of drug trafficking organizations. According to Schiphol team agents, the intelligence database employed by Schiphol law enforcement is computerized and could be shared easily with the US given a green-light from both the prosecutor and Justice Ministry.

Comment

¶20. Despite indications drug seizures at Schiphol are decreasing, the broader impact of the Schiphol 100% interdiction policy remains unclear. Post will investigate other drug routes to assess the scope of diversion and continue to develop a clearer picture of drug traffic into the Netherlands. Embassy officials will also continue to press the Dutch for access to information on couriers detained at Schiphol. End Comment.

Russel